

Committee on Resources

Statement

**Testimony Presented to the Congressional Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources
Scranton, Pennsylvania - January 24, 2000
Testimony Presented by - David A. Donlin
President, Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania
Executive Director, Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce**

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I would like to thank the members of this Congressional Committee on Resources for your interest in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania, and for granting me this opportunity to offer my life experience concerning our great regional community.

I am not an expert on anthracite mining, nor am I an environmental expert, but all of my life experience has been here in the anthracite coal fields of Northeastern Pennsylvania, with the exception of service to my country in the United States Air Force.

For nearly ten years, I have served as the paid executive of the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce, which is based in Pottsville. I currently serve as the volunteer President of the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania which serves seven of our counties, and have served in many volunteer leadership positions in economic and community development, and in human services capacities in three of our counties. Another current voluntary involvement is as a Task Force Co-Chair on Economic Development for Schuylkill County's VISION, a citizen-based action program that has developed a strategic plan for the redevelopment of Schuylkill County. I share the experience of many of my professional colleagues throughout the region, that of working to recreate communities and opportunities while having one arm tied behind our backs.

This visionary legislative proposal that you are considering here in Scranton today, represents the beginning of what I believe is the third phase of our regional restoration to the benefits of full American citizenship. After our region and our ancestors fueled the industrial revolution in America we were left with the environmental devastation and the almost total destruction of our regional economy. Both of those experiences have been quantified and recorded for history. I also happen to believe that the invisible devastation that occurred to our collective human dignity still remains, limiting our capacity to develop our region's infrastructure, or our collective human potential. We have been successful in surviving 25%

unemployment rates over decades by self-investment in jobs with limited pay and benefits that represented the post World War II experience. Not only did we end up at that time, beginning to export some of our finest and well-educated sons and daughters because of the limited opportunity of that era, we were also exporting the environmental residuals of the devastating mining experience of the previous hundred years. Unfortunately, this experience continues today. However, positive experience that we did discover, at that time, was found in the excellent work ethic of our neighbors.

Our second phase has been more successful in that our excellent educational institutions, working together with community-based local, regional, state and federal development organizations have created a workforce with greater skills and that same strong work ethic.

Wages and benefits have grown and unemployment has been reduced, but we still lag behind our state and nation in both employment and wage and benefit programs, and we still lack the regional community and the financial capacities to tackle large projects because of the absence of developable land and the conditions of the land that we have inherited.

This proposal, in my opinion, represents the great opportunity that our region needs to once again participate as equals in the American society. The restoration of our sacred lands will reestablish our collective spirit and allow all of us to work together to share in the great benefits of being United States citizens.

Through the use of the opportunities represented in this program we can work through regional mechanisms, leverage additional public and private investment (for example, the American Heritage River Initiative, the commonwealth's Keystone Opportunity Zone Program it's Reclaim Pennsylvania Mine Reclamation Program and the public/private initiative, the Financial Resources for the Environment (FRE) being proposed by utilities and banks in the commonwealth) to recreate the region, and most importantly, in my opinion, to create that new vision of a Northeastern Pennsylvania community that shares the same opportunities, the same environmental qualities, and the same spirit that has made the United States a great country.

Through this new commitment to Northeastern Pennsylvania we can continue our great work ethic and create new investment opportunities that will make our region an attractive quality of life experience. We will be able to recover many of our sons and daughters who have migrated away from home, to rejoin their families, offer an entirely new generational experience for new citizens moving to our communities, and stop export of the acid mine water that pollutes all of the Northeastern Pennsylvania tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay.

The anthracite mining experience of past generations has left us with our heritage, both good and bad. Currently, the anthracite industry, through favorable tax credit consideration by the Congress back in the 1980's, initiated number of cogeneration facilities that provide appropriate environment measures absent in the past. Proposals for conversion of coal energy to liquid fuel, and carbon research technology both represent new approach to anthracite coal recovery that also recognize and meet environmental standards of the United States in the 21st century. This proposal would assist us in cleaning up our region and restoring its natural beauty while also recognizing new technologies that meet environmental requirements.

Many regions of the United States have suffered through environmental and economic devastation, and with public investment have recovered to become important cogs in the United States economy. Here in Northeastern Pennsylvania we have shared our resources by fueling the industrial revolution which built the United States. We have done everything within our collective capacity to reach the American dream. The

opportunity represented in this proposal created by our congressional delegation is the expressway to our future of national equality as a region. It is our road to full participation in the wonderful experience encompassed in being United States citizens. We thank you for your interest and look forward to a wonderful new partnership in recreating Northeastern Pennsylvania.

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